

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 537

By Brooks K

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Eva Mae LeFevre.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Eva Mae LeFevre; and

WHEREAS, known as the First Lady of Gospel Music, Mrs. LeFevre devoted the better part of her ninety-one years to a musical ministry that brought joy and a powerful message of faith to countless seekers and believers; and

WHEREAS, born August 17, 1917, in McCall, South Carolina, Mrs. LeFevre was the daughter of Reverend and Mrs. H. L. Whittington; at the age of five, she began singing at her father's street-corner services, and she was playing the pump organ in her father's church services at the age of six; and

WHEREAS, when Mrs. LeFevre was only eight, she met a sixteen-year-old Urias LeFevre and his brother, Alphas, for the first time when the LeFevres were invited to sing at Reverend Whittington's church; and

WHEREAS, the LeFevre name has been an integral part of Southern gospel music since 1921, when the LeFevre brothers and their sister, Maude, began singing in their hometown of Smithville, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, eight years after they first met, Eva Mae LeFevre and Urias LeFevre were married at the Tremont Avenue Church of God in Greenville, South Carolina; Mrs. LeFevre soon joined the two brothers to form the LeFevre Trio; and

WHEREAS, the LeFevres moved to Atlanta in 1939 and began performing locally; soon, they had a contract with Atlanta's WGST for a regular radio show, which they continued for ten years; and

WHEREAS, during World War II, the LeFevre brothers answered their country's call to duty, and Eva Mae LeFevre remained stateside to sing with the Homeland Harmony Quartet, maintain the household, and raise her three children, Pierce, Meurice, and Andrea; and

WHEREAS, once the LeFevre brothers returned from the war, the Trio was reunited and began touring the South; during this period, Eva Mae and Urias LeFevre had another son, Mylon; and

WHEREAS, in the mid-1950s, daughter Monteia was born to Mr. and Mrs. LeFevre and due to her special needs, the family moved to Philadelphia to seek medical assistance for their youngest child; they remained there for two years, moving back to Atlanta in the late 1950s; and

WHEREAS, during the 1960s, the LeFevres enjoyed a golden era; their weekly television program, *The Gospel Singing Caravan*, made the LeFevres a household name across the United States; as the Master of Ceremonies, Mrs. LeFevre charmed audiences with her graciousness, keen wit, trademark laugh, and unique piano style; and

WHEREAS, during that period, sons Pierce and Mylon joined their parents on *The Gospel Singing Caravan*; later in the decade, the Speer Family joined the show as well, which was then renamed *The New Gospel Singing Caravan*; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, the LeFevres celebrated the gospel group's fiftieth anniversary with the album *Fifty Golden Years*; the decade that followed would bring many changes to the LeFevres; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Urias LeFevre announced his retirement, and Alphus retired two years later; in the spring of 1977, Eva Mae LeFevre retired from the road as well, and the LeFevres became the Rex Nelon Singers; and

WHEREAS, for her many years of evangelizing through the medium of gospel music, Eva Mae LeFevre became the first living woman to be inducted into Nashville's Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 1978; and

WHEREAS, the first years of her retirement held many sorrows for Eva Mae LeFevre; both her mother and her husband, Urias, passed away in 1979; and

WHEREAS, in 1985, Mrs. LeFevre lost her son, Pierce; in 1987, she lost another son, Monty, and her brother-in-law, Alphus, died not long after; and

WHEREAS, after that succession of sad losses, Eva Mae LeFevre received yet another signal honor: in 1988, she became the first gospel music artist to be inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, in 1991, gospel legend Bill Gaither invited Mrs. LeFevre, along with a host of other stars, to join him on a recording of "Where Could I Go"; during this gathering, Mrs. LeFevre initiated an impromptu jam session that Mr. Gaither cites as the genesis of his ever popular Homecoming Friends video series, which continues to delight audiences today; and

WHEREAS, in her last years, Eva Mae LeFevre frequently appeared on the Homecoming tour and in many of Mr. Gaither's television specials; even after triple bypass surgery at the age of eighty-four, Mrs. LeFevre continued to perform, bringing hope and joy to audiences all over the Southeast; and

WHEREAS, in 1997, the Southern Gospel Music Association in Smithville, Tennessee, inducted Mrs. LeFevre into its Hall of Fame; and

WHEREAS, her success in these later years was accompanied by tribulation as well; both her daughter, Andrea, and her beloved father, H. L. Whittington, have passed on; and

WHEREAS, despite the vicissitudes of her life, Eva Mae LeFevre never wavered in her determination to share her faith through her music; along the way, she built a family and forged countless friendships that brought her endless joy, which she always sought to share, on stage and in person; and

WHEREAS, she will be sorely missed by many, from her fellow artists to her fans, all of whom heard in her beautiful alto voice and in her infectious laughter the greatest happiness and strongest hope; and

WHEREAS, gospel music constitutes an important part of the rich cultural heritage that has defined this State and the Southeast for generations; thanks to people like Eva Mae LeFevre, this heritage continues to grow and gain strength, and it will no doubt abide for many generations to come; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional artist and evangelist; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Eva Mae LeFevre, reflecting fondly upon her impeccable character and her stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mrs. LeFevre.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.